

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

JASON JOSEPH SILVA,  
Plaintiff,  
v.

CAROLYN W. COLVIN,<sup>1</sup> Acting  
Commissioner of Social Security,  
Defendant.

Case No. CV 12-9846 JC

MEMORANDUM OPINION AND  
ORDER OF REMAND

**I. SUMMARY**

On January 11, 2013, plaintiff Jason Joseph Silva (“plaintiff”) filed a Complaint seeking review of the Commissioner of Social Security’s denial of plaintiff’s application for benefits. The parties have consented to proceed before a United States Magistrate Judge.

This matter is before the Court on the parties’ cross motions for summary judgment, respectively (“Plaintiff’s Motion”) and (“Defendant’s Motion”). The Court has taken both motions under submission without oral argument. See Fed. R. Civ. P. 78; L.R. 7-15; January 17, 2013 Case Management Order ¶ 5.

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<sup>1</sup>Carolyn W. Colvin is substituted as Acting Commissioner of Social Security pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 25(d).



1 Based on the record as a whole and the applicable law, the decision of the  
2 Commissioner is REVERSED AND REMANDED for further proceedings  
3 consistent with this Memorandum Opinion and Order of Remand.

4 **II. BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY OF ADMINISTRATIVE**  
5 **DECISION**

6 On December 19, and December 22, 2008, respectively, plaintiff filed  
7 applications for Supplemental Security Income and Disability Insurance Benefits.  
8 (Administrative Record (“AR”) 13, 145, 151). Plaintiff asserted that he became  
9 disabled on January 20, 2006, due to cervical disc protrusion, cervical discopathy  
10 & radiculopathy, traumatic head injury, post-concussion head syndrome,  
11 adjustment disorder due to chronic pain, hypersomnia, neurogenic bladder, erectile  
12 dysfunction, and spinal cord stimulator implant. (AR 176). The ALJ examined  
13 the medical record and heard testimony from plaintiff (who was represented by  
14 counsel) on June 1, 2010 and February 3, 2011. (AR 32-63).

15 On February 18, 2011, the Administrative Law Judge (“ALJ”) determined  
16 that plaintiff was not disabled prior to February 28, 2010, but became disabled on  
17 February 28, 2010, and remained disabled through the date of the decision. (AR  
18 14, 25). Specifically, the ALJ found: (1) between January 20, 2006 (*i.e.*, the date  
19 on which plaintiff alleges he became disabled) and February 28, 2010 (the date on  
20 which plaintiff actually became disabled according to the ALJ), plaintiff suffered  
21 from the following severe impairment: status post C6-7 cervical surgery with cord  
22 compression residuals<sup>2</sup> (AR 16); (2) since January 20, 2006, plaintiff’s  
23 impairments, considered singly or in combination, did not meet or medically equal  
24 one of the listed impairments (AR 18); (3) prior to February 28, 2010, plaintiff  
25 retained the residual functional capacity essentially to perform sedentary work  
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27 <sup>2</sup>The ALJ also found that, beginning on February 28, 2010, plaintiff suffered from the  
28 additional severe impairment of a neurogenic bladder. (AR 16).



1 with additional exertional and nonexertional limitations (AR 18);<sup>3</sup> (4) plaintiff  
 2 could not perform his past relevant work (AR 23); (5) prior to February 28, 2010,  
 3 there were jobs that existed in significant numbers in the national economy that  
 4 plaintiff could perform, specifically hand cutter, product folder, and bench hand  
 5 (AR 23-24); and (6) prior to February 28, 2010, plaintiff's allegations regarding  
 6 his limitations were not credible to the extent they were inconsistent with the  
 7 ALJ's residual functional capacity assessment (AR 21).

8 The Appeals Council denied plaintiff's application for review. (AR 1).

### 9 **III. APPLICABLE LEGAL STANDARDS**

#### 10 **A. Sequential Evaluation Process**

11 To qualify for disability benefits, a claimant must show that the claimant is  
 12 unable "to engage in any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically  
 13 determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in  
 14 death or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not  
 15 less than 12 months." Molina v. Astrue, 674 F.3d 1104, 1110 (9th Cir. 2012)  
 16 (quoting 42 U.S.C. § 423(d)(1)(A)) (internal quotation marks omitted). The  
 17 impairment must render the claimant incapable of performing the work claimant  
 18 previously performed and incapable of performing any other substantial gainful  
 19 employment that exists in the national economy. Tackett v. Apfel, 180 F.3d 1094,  
 20 1098 (9th Cir. 1999) (citing 42 U.S.C. § 423(d)(2)(A)).

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22  
 23 <sup>3</sup>The ALJ determined that prior to February 28, 2010, plaintiff (i) could lift up to ten  
 24 pounds occasionally; (ii) could stand and walk up to two hours cumulatively, and sit up to six  
 25 hours cumulatively in an eight-hour workday; (iii) required a cane for ambulation for distances  
 26 greater than fifteen feet; (iv) could occasionally bend, stoop, kneel, crawl, and climb; (v) could  
 27 occasionally push and pull with the upper extremities; (vi) could only occasionally perform  
 28 complex technical work; and (vii) could perform simple, routine and repetitive work at a stress  
 level of four on a scale of one to ten, with examples of "ten" being the stress level of an air traffic  
 controller and "one" being the stress level of a night dishwasher (as such occupations are  
 generally performed in the national economy). (AR 18-19).



1 In assessing whether a claimant is disabled, an ALJ is to follow a five-step  
2 sequential evaluation process:

- 3 (1) Is the claimant presently engaged in substantial gainful activity? If  
4 so, the claimant is not disabled. If not, proceed to step two.
- 5 (2) Is the claimant's alleged impairment sufficiently severe to limit  
6 the claimant's ability to work? If not, the claimant is not  
7 disabled. If so, proceed to step three.
- 8 (3) Does the claimant's impairment, or combination of  
9 impairments, meet or equal an impairment listed in 20 C.F.R.  
10 Part 404, Subpart P, Appendix 1? If so, the claimant is  
11 disabled. If not, proceed to step four.
- 12 (4) Does the claimant possess the residual functional capacity to  
13 perform claimant's past relevant work? If so, the claimant is  
14 not disabled. If not, proceed to step five.
- 15 (5) Does the claimant's residual functional capacity, when  
16 considered with the claimant's age, education, and work  
17 experience, allow the claimant to adjust to other work that  
18 exists in significant numbers in the national economy? If so,  
19 the claimant is not disabled. If not, the claimant is disabled.

20 Stout v. Commissioner, Social Security Administration, 454 F.3d 1050, 1052 (9th  
21 Cir. 2006) (citing 20 C.F.R. §§ 404.1520, 416.920); see also Molina, 674 F.3d at  
22 1110 (same).

23 The claimant has the burden of proof at steps one through four, and the  
24 Commissioner has the burden of proof at step five. Bustamante v. Massanari, 262  
25 F.3d 949, 953-54 (9th Cir. 2001) (citing Tackett, 180 F.3d at 1098); see also Burch  
26 v. Barnhart, 400 F.3d 676, 679 (9th Cir. 2005) (claimant carries initial burden of  
27 proving disability).

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1           **B.     Standard of Review**

2           Pursuant to 42 U.S.C. section 405(g), a court may set aside a denial of  
3 benefits only if it is not supported by substantial evidence or if it is based on legal  
4 error. Robbins v. Social Security Administration, 466 F.3d 880, 882 (9th Cir.  
5 2006) (citing Flaten v. Secretary of Health & Human Services, 44 F.3d 1453, 1457  
6 (9th Cir. 1995)). Substantial evidence is “such relevant evidence as a reasonable  
7 mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion.” Richardson v. Perales,  
8 402 U.S. 389, 401 (1971) (citations and quotations omitted). It is more than a  
9 mere scintilla but less than a preponderance. Robbins, 466 F.3d at 882 (citing  
10 Young v. Sullivan, 911 F.2d 180, 183 (9th Cir. 1990)).

11           To determine whether substantial evidence supports a finding, a court must  
12 “consider the record as a whole, weighing both evidence that supports and  
13 evidence that detracts from the [Commissioner’s] conclusion.” Aukland v.  
14 Massanari, 257 F.3d 1033, 1035 (9th Cir. 2001) (quoting Penny v. Sullivan, 2 F.3d  
15 953, 956 (9th Cir. 1993)). If the evidence can reasonably support either affirming  
16 or reversing the ALJ’s conclusion, a court may not substitute its judgment for that  
17 of the ALJ. Robbins, 466 F.3d at 882 (citing Flaten, 44 F.3d at 1457).

18           **IV.   DISCUSSION AND ORDERS**

19           Plaintiff contends that a reversal or remand is warranted, in part, because the  
20 ALJ failed properly to evaluate the opinions of multiple treating and/or examining  
21 physicians. (Plaintiff’s Motion at 3-12). Defendant essentially concedes that the  
22 ALJ failed properly to evaluate certain medical opinion evidence, and that a  
23 reversal and remand for additional administrative proceedings is appropriate.  
24 (Defendant’s Motion at 2-5).

25           The Court finds that remand is appropriate to permit the ALJ to reevaluate  
26 the medical opinion evidence, and, as appropriate, to develop the record further,  
27 hold a new hearing, and issue a new administrative decision. However,  
28 notwithstanding plaintiff’s contentions to the contrary, the Court is not persuaded



1 that this is one of the rare cases where immediate payment of benefits should be  
2 ordered.<sup>4</sup>

3 Accordingly, the decision of the Commissioner of Social Security is  
4 reversed in part, and this matter is remanded for further administrative action  
5 consistent with this Opinion.<sup>5</sup>

6 LET JUDGMENT BE ENTERED ACCORDINGLY.

7 DATED: June 26, 2013

8 /s/

9 Honorable Jacqueline Chooljian  
10 UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE  
11  
12  
13  
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15 <sup>4</sup>When a court reverses an administrative determination, “the proper course, except in rare  
16 circumstances, is to remand to the agency for additional investigation or explanation.”  
17 Immigration & Naturalization Service v. Ventura, 537 U.S. 12, 16 (2002) (citations and  
18 quotations omitted). Remand is proper where, as here, additional administrative proceedings  
19 could remedy the defects in the decision. McAllister v. Sullivan, 888 F.2d 599, 603 (9th Cir.  
20 1989).

21 <sup>5</sup>The Court need not, and has not adjudicated plaintiff’s other challenges to the ALJ’s  
22 decision, except insofar as to determine that a reversal and remand for immediate payment of  
23 benefits would not be appropriate. On remand, the Administration may wish to consider  
24 defendant’s request that the ALJ be instructed to:

25 (1) update the treatment evidence on Plaintiff’s medical conditions; (2) evaluate  
26 expressly the medical source opinions . . . and explain the reasons for the weight  
27 given to [such] opinion evidence; (3) reconsider Plaintiff’s residual functional  
28 capacity based on the updated record, citing specific evidence in support of the  
assessed limitations; (4) consider further whether plaintiff has past relevant work  
that he could perform with the limitations established by the evidence; and  
(5) secure, as appropriate, supplemental evidence from a vocational expert to  
clarify the effect of the assessed limitations on Plaintiff’s occupational base.

(Defendant’s Motion at 4).